

January 2026

Muni- Muni

CfBS Core Year-End Reflections



Center for Babaylan Studies

Mahal na CfBS Pamilya,

Maligayang Pasko!

Good greetings from all of us in the CfBS Core Team—Maileen, Justine, Alixa, Aissa, Kurt, Eric, Drew, Danielle, and Ate Lily!

We were going to send you our regular year-end “newsletter”—recounting our “accomplishments” for the year (at the end of which we ask for your money 😊), but our impish resident duwende nudged us (“nagged” is more like it) to do something different this time around.

The result is the zine in your hands (or rather on your screen) featuring our Core Team’s muni-muni (reflections) on their respective life journeyings. We hope you find the varied entries provocative and inspiring!



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Just a small word from me, Ate Lily:

Ever since the reconstitution of our Core Team in December of 2023 and the launching of our Kapwa Nilalang Symposium in 2024, we have committed to having us focus our mission/vision *more sharply* on this most crucial thing: for us all to learn to fall in love with the Holy Earth once more, as our Katutubo (Indigenous Kin) from the homeland (and elsewhere in the world) have been longing to teach us.

They say, it is from *Inang Kalikasan* (our Earth Mother) that all provision and wisdom comes. She is the reason we live, breathe, and have our being. It is from Her we learn generosity, contentment, and gratitude. From Her that we learn the virtues of *kapwa*, reciprocity, the simple courtesy of asking for permission. It is from Her we learn the wisdom of limits, given that the planet is not here for us, but for all of life to thrive.

Today, we feel the grief of our Mother, in the relentless ravaging of her forests, the poisoning of her waters, soils, and air, in the endless excavation of her mountains for precious metals and minerals, and in the enslaving and murder of her myriad creatures so the likes of us could live in relative comfort and convenience. And because our *Katutubo's* love for the Earth — Her soils, waters, forests, mountains, skies, and all Her beings — is big, their grief, as we can only imagine, is beyond compare.

And so we ask, what to do?

One of our indigenous teachers writes:

The Earth is a big ear; she's always listening. The song she sings is the life we live. Learn courtesy and speak beauty, that way She'll know you're listening
(Prechtel, *Rescuing the Light*, p. 220).

To learn to make beauty as an offering to the world seems so puny in the face of the enormity of what we're currently facing. But just as this culture of greed and mindless consumption has taken a long time to take root, we're reminded that it takes as much time to re-learn how to live well and beautifully again.

At a holiday dinner Jim and I had at our neighbors' home the other night, we wondered aloud at the stupendous seed pods that the honey locust trees in our neighborhood have shed this Fall. We've never seen the ground covered with so many pods before (and Jim even attempted googling the phenomenon to no avail). Then, one of the older guests said, "From what I know, when locust trees are nearing the end of their life, they bring forth as many seed pods as they can in anticipation of their demise, so at least some of them might take hold and grow up to replace them."

I think of us older ones in our CfBS movement as those senior locust trees,



By Ryan Hodnett - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0

putting out as many seed pods as we can as we anticipate the end of our time this side of Earth—"seed pods" as in our ongoing Pagsuyo study group, local book clubs, Elders' circles, support of our indigenous grassroots partners in the homeland, etc. We do this in order, perchance, that some of the seeds may germinate and bring a new culture to life, one that can host that beautiful way of living again that our species has known for the majority of our time on the planet.

"I think of us older ones in our CfBS movement as those senior locust trees, putting out as many seed pods as we can as we anticipate the end of our time this side of Earth—"seed pods" as in our ongoing Pagsuyo study group, local book clubs, Elders' circles, support of our indigenous grassroots partners in the homeland, etc. We do this in order, perchance, that some of the seeds may germinate and bring a new culture to life, one that can host that beautiful way of living again that our species has known for the majority of our time on the planet."

This is our hope, our reason for being.

Join us. Connect with us.

And if you are so moved, support our work by donating via Venmo @babaylanstudies or PayPal @CFBSPayments. If you require other methods, please email us.

Love,

Ate Lily



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Reflection

By Aissa Galang (our newest Core team member)

“Learning indigenous practices was like finding something I had been looking for. This gives my life purpose and holds me to a standard I didn’t have before.”

— Inspired by Quote from Ate Leny

“Indigeneity” (and the term “indigenous”) is full of contestation and contradiction. I use it...to refer to the values shared by indigenous peoples globally and expressed in different ways through languages and cultural traditions: the belief that the Earth is Alive and Sacred. That Land cannot be owned. That Spirit is imbued in all of creation. That humans are not the crowning glory of creation but the last species to be created and so must be taught by the older species. That the Spirit or Unseen realm must be fed by our offerings of love and beauty so that this world may remain in harmony and balance. That humans cannot take more than what they need without jeopardizing this balance.

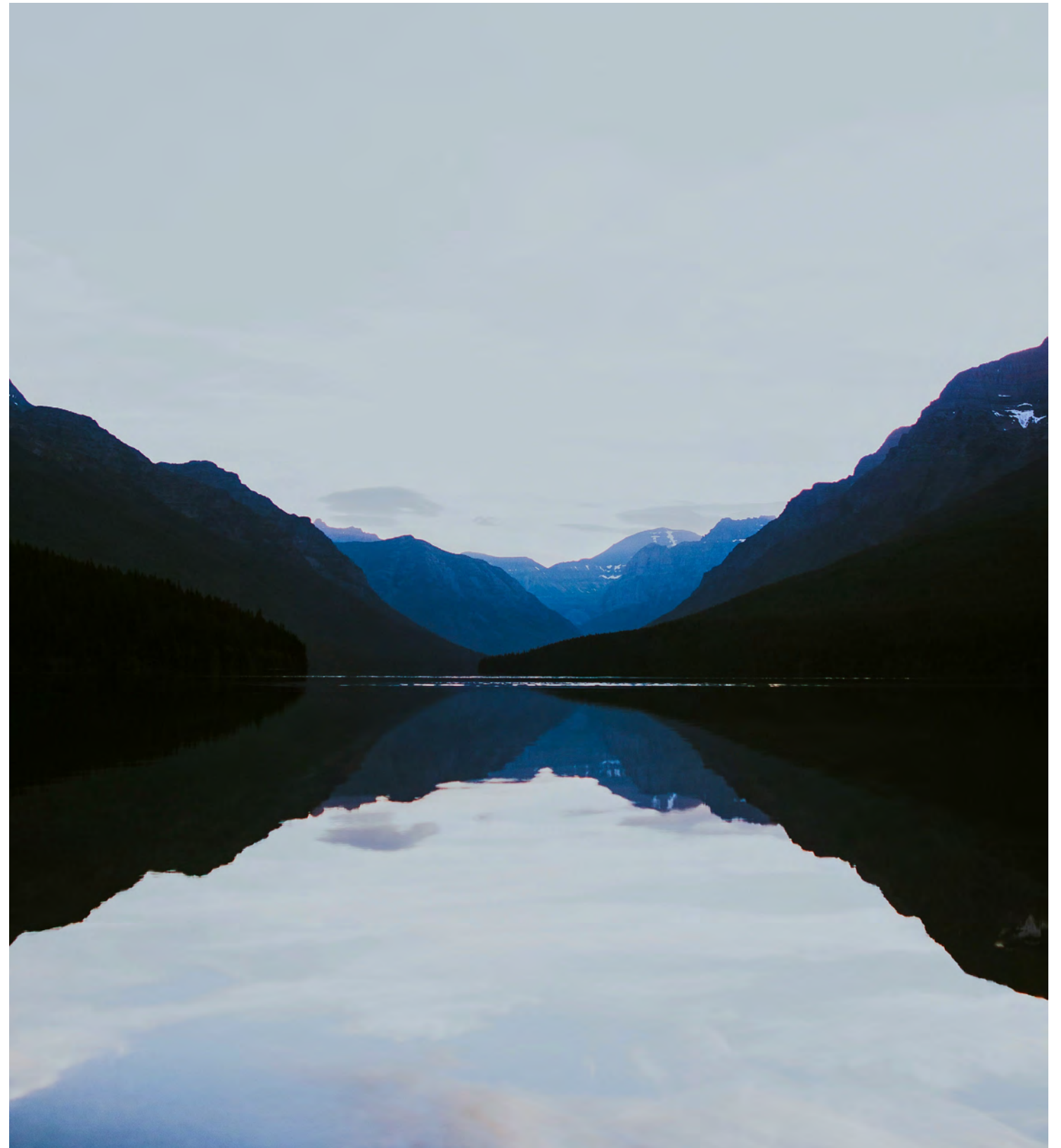


Photo by Ivana Cajina — Unsplash





Presence

By Alixa Lacerna

I'd been sitting at the dining table, taking stock of the last two years, writing down the changes asked of me from all kinds of seasons—rest, pause, story, work, summer, winter, shoulder, rainy, not rainy, micro. I noted that last year was a crash course in prayer and a mellowing of accumulated suffering. Now, there's a new feeling of being ready.

As I was writing about this year, I heard a knock at my door. Presence came to visit.

Dayon! Welcome! I let them in because I was curious.

Once inside, Presence turned to me and asked, "What brings you here?"

I sputtered, incredulous at being asked the question in my own house. But I sat back down and answered, suddenly filled with gratitude, "I'm here because of radiance and warm nightly embraces; a quiet house who meditates like her inhabitants and apples who grow on a Beech-lined Ave; baggy pants, shaking hands and legs, and doing things anyway; and eel-crocs and lynxes, spiders and white tigers. I'm here because now I have a name that tells of the world I'm from, the self I'm becoming, and what I get to create."

I took a breath and continued, "I came when my spirit was low and then I met You, my friend."

Presence smiled and settled to read by the fire. I went back to writing, glad that I was asked a question of arrival, one that implied that I'd been somewhere and had something to share.

"Would you like to stay for a while?" I asked Presence.

"Want me around?" They replied.

Photo by Serrah Galos — Unsplash



Growing Seeds Saved from My Dad

By Danielle Daguio

To me, being a part of the Center for Babaylan Studies and a part of the urban farming in Detroit means that the indigenous connection I cultivate is through growing a deeper relationship to Filipino foods. Yes, I literally mean growing the foods we eat. And, yes, you can grow Filipino food in the Midwest! The Family Foodways Gardens at Keep Growing Detroit Farm is a space where staff can grow foods connected to their heritage.

This year, I grew crops from seeds saved by my dad, who saved them from crops from the Philippines. I named my garden, Kubo Crops. Kubo means hut, and the crops grown in my garden are common to what would be grown around someone's home in the Philippines, many of which are featured in the children's song called Bahay Kubo, a type of traditional home built on stilts in the motherland.

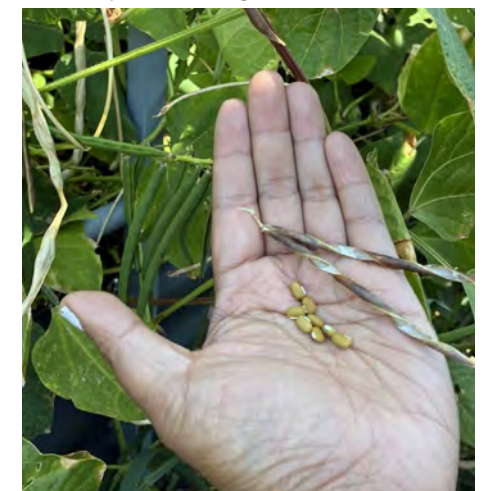
Here's what I grew: (names are in Ilokano - Tagalog - English)

- Sili ti Diabolo - Siling Labuyo - Filipino Bird's Eye Chili
- Laya - Luya - Ginger
- Kuliaw - Luyang Dilaw - Turmeric
- Paria - Ampalaya - Smooth Bitter Melon
- Balatong - Monggo - Mung Beans
- Kamatis - Kamatis - Tomato
- Utong - Sitaw - Yardlong Beans
- Tarong - Talong - Asian Eggplant
- Mirapait - Mirasól - Sunflowers*

It was deeply healing for me to connect to my family, culture, and broader Filipino diaspora, and a major reframe for me on how I think about these foods.

It was powerful to know that growing seeds saved from my dad on the Keep Growing Detroit Farm was only possible because I was there and part of this work. These were all crops that I've only seen in a specialty grocery store. Being a part of the growing process I was able to build a deeper connection and appreciation for these plant kin in a way that I didn't when I was growing up.

For example, the bitter melon or ampalaya is something I grew up totally hating and never wanted to eat. Now that I grow it, I have an interest in learning more about it and discovering ways to eat it. Caring for the seeds saved from my dad gave me the opportunity to learn the names he called these vegetables, learn the leaves he saw while they grew, and when they mature to bear fruits, learn how he would cook them to their fullest potential. Below are recipes I learned using this season's Kubo Crops to their fullest potential. I hope you're able to try them together with your family, and hopefully, be brave enough to grow them from seeds yourself — including ampalaya!



Photos by Danielle Daguio

* Not traditionally a Filipino crop, but grown here alongside the monggo for trellising, and an ode to Three Sisters gardening in native American cultures are corn, beans, and squash



Cooking Monggo

Ginataang Monggo Guisado

Filipino stew of mung beans and bitter melon cooked in coconut milk.
Adapted from astigvegan.com

Ingredients:

- 4 cups dried mung beans, rinse in cold water and discard the discolored or shriveled beans
- 1 bunch spinach, bitter melon leaves, moringa leaves, or other leafy greens, stems removed
- 1 head garlic, chopped
- 1 cup squash, cubed - optional
- 1 large yellow onion, chopped
- 1 hot pepper, sliced in large pieces - optional
- 1 cup tomatoes, chopped
- 2 cups fried tofu cubes - optional
- 1 knob, about 3", ginger, chopped
- 1 can coconut cream
- 1 large eggplant, salted, sliced
- Water
- 1 cup bitter melon, salted then sliced thin
- Oil

Directions:

1. In a pot, add mung beans and enough water to cover. Bring to a boil over medium heat until the beans are tender. Add water as needed. Can also be done in a pressure cooker.
2. In another pot, saute garlic, onion, tomato, ginger with salt and pepper. When softened add eggplant, bitter melon, squash. Season again.
3. Add water to cover the saute mix, then fold in the mung beans. Season again. Cook until the consistency you'd like, soupy or thick. Add water as needed.
4. Add tofu cubes, then coconut cream and leafy greens. Lastly add the pepper. Simmer and adjust seasonings. Serve over rice.



Sinamak

Filipino spicy vinegar

Ingredients:

- Glass jar or bottle
- Coconut or cane vinegar
- Hot peppers
- Garlic, sliced
- Ginger, sliced
- Onion, sliced
- Peppercorns -optional

Directions:

1. Combine all ingredients into the glass container. Vinegar should cover the ingredients.
2. Shake and store in the refrigerator.
3. Continue to top with vinegar or add ingredients as needed with use over time.
4. Serve with fried or grilled foods



Falling in Love with Bewilderment

By Drew Pineda

Running a community bookstore during a cold Detroit winter feels repetitive and doubly exhausting because of the holiday rush: a morning commute where outside it's all gray and "dirty" snow.

The sun goes down at 5 pm. Sometimes the light of imagination can feel like a fleeting glimmer. And, if I'm not careful, the push to make year-end goals or satisfy panicky customers can strip away the wonder in the work I do.

There's a joy in seeing a child's mind in action while they're reading a beautifully drawn picture book. I imagine it's a similar look on my face when I'm in nature, trying to "read" a tree. How often have I stopped, stared at a tree and wondered about its roots: which parts were exposed, if there'd been any damage to it. Wondering if trees grow the same way our teeth do. How a tree's fibers can become the very sheets of paper that allow us to spread our own thoughts and ideas.

Imagination, the ability to witness miracles, is an inherent gift to be born with—one that our ancestors knew to cultivate through storytelling. I often wonder, what story am I telling? Who's story am I telling and am I telling it beautifully?

When I was younger, my family and I would go camping in Utah. We'd sit around a fire and tell stories. (One story my mom would tell you today is the time I shushed everyone around the fire because the animals were sleeping. I thought it was rude to keep them up at night.) This image comes to me when I think about my deepening relationship to the land I'm on and our indigenous ways of being.

Stories that I've recently witnessed but that I am still understanding: the indigenous Filipino fabrics, artifacts, and tools seen at the Field Museum this past summer in Chicago. The beauty of dance from around the world.



Photo by 27TH Letter Books

What it might look like to become an elder...

Transitioning to 2026, I may not yet be able to imagine what's in store for me, this country, for our kapwa and those in the homeland. But I believe whatever it is, is in the fire that beckons me as though I'm a child falling in love with bewilderment itself.



On Rocks and Leaves

By Eric Wilson

Watercolor and colored pencils on 150 gsm cotton paper.

The human eye sees hundreds
if not thousands
of greens

Under the dappled canopy
rusty rocks rise from
riverbeds

Our skin dewy from
muddy ochre paste
bloodstream filled with iron

Which came first? The leaf
mind-eye or perhaps, merely
the rock.



Sawaga

By Justine Villanueva

A Poem in Bisaya-Cebuano

I am from the river of my ancestors, the sensuous Sawaga River, which flows to the proud Pulangui River, which flows to the majestic Mindanao River, which flows to the powerful Pacific Ocean, which flows to the peaceful Putah Creek in Davis, California, where I now dwell.

Since becoming a mother over a decade ago, I continue to hear the world's call to publish children's books about kapwa and other indigenous Filipino values. I named my publishing press Sawaga River Press to honor my roots and ancestors.

As I deepen my commitment to kapwa, CfBS, and publishing, I offer this poem to the river that forever flows with me.

(These words, this poem, came to me in Bisaya. I have a hard time translating it, worry that "something" is lost or changed in the process. But maybe that, too, is part of what it's all about—evolving, becoming, and emerging into something else we didn't even know was possible. And it's a good thing.)

Yuta maanindot sama sa panit nako

Soil beautiful as my skin

Pita bugnaw sa tiil

Mud cool to the feet

Balas panghugas sa kaldero

Sand to wash the pots

Dagkong bato dili mabangbang

Solid rock steadfast

Dahon naanod ning-apas sa gabon

Leaves on a stream praising the clouds

Karpa hilom hilom sa ilawom

Carp swimming silent in the deep

Sirena nagpahiyum sa adlaw

Mermaid basking in the sun

Kawayan nakigsayaw sa hangin

Bamboo swaying with the wind

Tubig hinungdan sa kinabuhi

Water is life

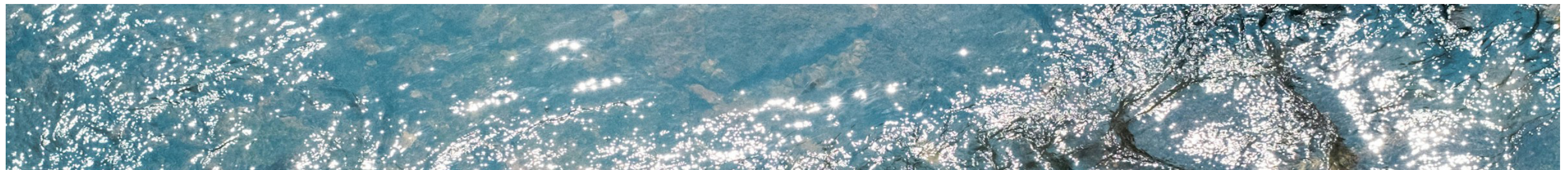


Photo by Du Ulba — Unsplash



Banig of Becoming

By Kurt Manuel

A banig is a handwoven mat made from dried leaves of pandan, buri, or tikog. For generations, families have used banigs for sleeping, sitting, and marking moments of ceremony. Each region carries their own way of weaving, their own unique rhythm and language expressed in the materials and patterns. In Samar and Leyte for example, tikog reeds are dyed bold colors and then woven into intricate designs including diamonds, stars, and zigzags.

The banigs patterns and colors communicate place, identity, and how people understand the world around them. Like many Filipino crafts, banig weaving is inseparable from the land itself. It depends on knowing when to harvest, how to prepare the fibers, and how to work in harmony with seasons. Weaving was also a shared practice. People sat together as stories were told and passed from elders to younger generations. These mats did more than serve daily needs, they carried memory and brought beauty into everyday life.

This paper banig I created began as a simple craft experience I offered at CfBS’s program “Handog: A Love Offering for Kapwa”. It was a symbolic gesture of the tradition. In this gathering, the Detroit community explored the gifts of pagbabalik-loob (home-returns) through story, food, remembering, and shared creativity. As I wove its colors together, I didn’t know it would become a small mirror for my own year: the unravelings, the pieces that shifted out of place, and the steady returns that helped me find my shape again. This banig became a quiet reminder that even when life buckles or loosens, we are always capable of weaving ourselves back with the help of community, held by Kapwa and held by love.

DIY Banig Paper Weaving Instructions

Materials:

- 2-3 sheets of construction paper (different colors)
- Pencil
- Scissors
- Craft tape or glue

Directions:

1. Fold your paper in half – hamburger style (short side to short side).
2. Draw lines starting at the folded edge and stopping about ½ inch before the open edge. Lines should be about 1 inch apart. You can make them straight, wavy, or squiggly!
3. Cut along the lines, stopping at your ½ inch margin so the paper stays intact. This will be your “loom”.
4. Write reflections on the strips of paper. Choose from prompts or create your own!
A. What’s a practice, story, or food from your family or ancestors that you want to keep alive?
B. What are ways you connect (or want to connect) with the land, plants, or seasons around you?
C. What is one gift you want to offer your community in the spirit of kapwa?
5. Weave the strips into your loom: go over and under each cut, alternating every row. As you thread each strip through the loom, imagine weaving your reflections into the larger fabric of yourself and community.
6. Trim any excess strips hanging off the edges.
7. Create a border using craft tape or by gluing strips along the edges to hold the weaving in place.

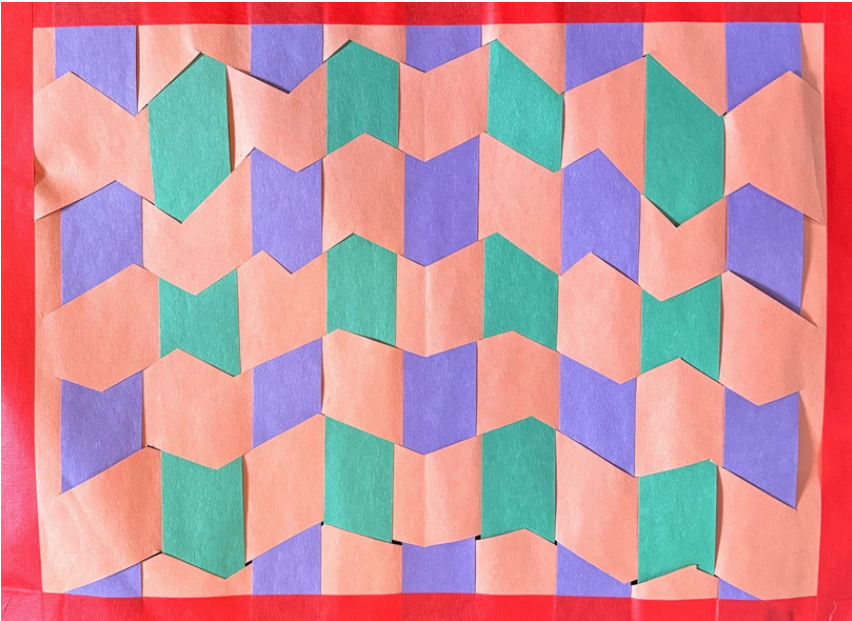


Photo and banig by Kurt Manuel

Of Snakes and Wild Dreaming

By Ate Lily Mendoza

Sometimes bemoaning my overdomesticated existence, the Wild comes to me in dreams...

The other night, this was Her gift...

*Out on my backyard
This one balmy day
Marcia,* Wild Woman kin
Comes traipsing in
Shovel in hand
Come to dig a hole
Right there in our yard*

*Dig, dig, dig
Wide and deep enough
Dig till groundwater seeps
Fills hole, first muddy
Then sparkling clear
Like clear blue sky*

**A real life friend studying with Jim and me under the same indigenous teacher, remarkably gifted in most ancient skills.*

*She jumps right in
Backfloats, eyes closed,
Face up to sky
Serene and relaxed
As relax could be
While underneath
Bright seashells gleam
Like buried jewels
Suddenly surfacing*

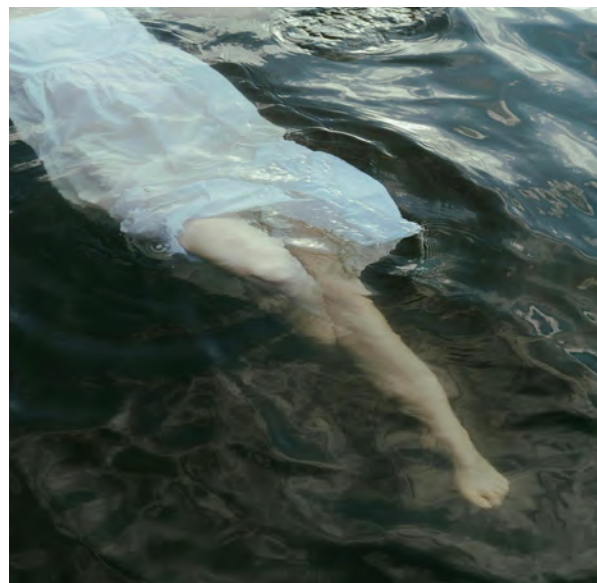


Photo by Cottonbro Studio — Pexels



Photo by Joost van Os — Pexels

*Next scene—
This time another
Wild woman kin
Comes and walks over
Finds fat white snake*

*Coiled, sunning contentedly
In low grass close by
She bends, scoops up
Cuddles snake in arms
Like a tender baby
As she sits on a bench nearby*

*And I, myself
A baby (human) in my arms
Happen to sit next to her
What do you know
As soon as I take
My spot on the bench
The infant in my arms
As though by instinct
Reaches over, puts head
To touch snake*

*Coiled creature kin
Stirs slightly
I flinch—
Protectively
Fearing snake bite
Till a voice inside rebukes,
Of course, 'tupid
Baby is curious!
Needs to connect!*

...With snake

And with that I wake up...



Prelude to a Journey

By Maileen Hamto

Sorrows marooned in unreal cities.
Tahimik, winter thaws frozen vistas.
Buntonghininga, know your breath.
Remember forgotten rituals –
sowing *palay*, gathering wood:
halakhakan, suyuan, damayan.

Dark earth holds grief and bliss,
tears of witness to the terrors of night.
Morning beckons. *Bukangliwayway*
lightens hearts aflame with bitter rage.
Tending grief, nourishing love
para sa kapwa, lupa, dangal.

Each whispered wish carries long-lost
dreams of wondering, wandering
through the darkness of whiteness,
the numbing falsehoods of empire.
The gift of return and re-memembering
kapit-bisig sa bagong araw.

Photo by author:
Watercolor of buyok-
buyok, commissioned
by Juan de Cuéllar,
Philippines Ink, tempera,
and watercolor on laid
paper; National Museum
of Anthropology in
Manila, Philippines



CENTER FOR BABAYLAN
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Muni-muni: Kapwa Nilalang Reflections

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Maraming salamat po!



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invoice@centerforbabalyanstudies.org

A scenic view of a lake with a wooden dock, a boat, and a large house in the background. The dock is crowded with people, and a boat is moored nearby. The house is a large, multi-story building with a gabled roof and many windows. The water is calm, reflecting the surrounding trees and the dock. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and relaxing.

Maraming Salamat Po!

Until next time, kapwatid ♥